DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 453 028 RC 022 975

AUTHOR Gilberts, Marilyn
TITLE Who Me? The Dilemma of Rural Special Education in the English Language Learner World.
PUB DATE 2001-03-00
NOTE 8p.; In: Growing Partnerships for Rural Special Education. Conference Proceedings (San Diego, CA, March 29-31, 2001); see RC 022 965.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cooperative Learning; *Educational Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; *Limited English Speaking; Peer Relationship; Reading Instruction; *Rural Schools; Second Language Instruction; *Special Education Teachers; *Vocabulary Development

ABSTRACT

From 1989 to 2000, the K-12 population of English language learners doubled in the United States and more than tripled in 12 states. When small rural schools first enroll children whose first language is not English, there may be no teachers endorsed specifically to meet linguistic needs, and special educators may be called on for advice. Special education teachers have been trained to meet a variety of special needs, and they are accustomed to involving the family in determining the strengths and needs of a student. In seeking to develop methods and strategies that are sound and functional, special educators can encourage the general educators in their school to provide a balanced educational experience that encompasses systematic phonics-based instruction and a print-rich environment. Vocabulary development is critical to the academic success of English language learners. Various principles and strategies of vocabulary instruction are discussed, including learning from context, teaching word meaning, keyword strategies, and explicit study systems. The valuable resource of peers, whether they know the dominant language of their fellow student or not, can provide a meaningful, interactive, educational experience for all involved. The success of one second-grade English language learner is briefly described. (Contains 25 references and 3 resources.) (SV)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Judy Weyrauch

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Marilyn Gilberts
Nebraska District #30
506 Belle Fourche Avenue
Chadron, NE 69337
amgilberts@hotmail.com

ED 453 028

WHO ME?: THE DILEMMA OF RURAL SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER WORLD

Our mobile world is bringing about an increasingly diverse student body into our classrooms across the country. Data from the National Clearinghouse on Bilingual Education (NCBE) as cited by Freeman and Freeman (2000), informs us that between 1989 and 2000, the general K-12 population grew by about 5.5 million students - a 13.6 percent increase. The English Language Learner (ELL), Limited English Proficient (LEP), or English as a Second Language (ESL) population grew from about 2 million to over 4 million - over 100 percent increase in the same period. No longer are the linguistically diverse students located only in the coastal states or even solely in large metropolitan areas. Though California, where 25 percent of the total K-12 population are ELLs, has the highest number of ELLs, its growth rate is not the highest. It is one of fourteen states whose ELL population grew between 50 to 100 percent from 1990 to 1997. In twelve states - including Alaska, Idaho, and Nebraska - ELL student numbers grew over 200 percent. Nine other states in the same period experienced a growth from 100 to 200 percent. Meeting the needs of the English language learner now is the challenge for all areas of the United States.

As a Spanish speaking family moves into a rural area of Nebraska because the father is hired for a job on a ranch, the children may be the only students for whom English is not the first language in the small school. A family may move off the reservation and enter a school somewhere in rural United States, and they are considered "limited English proficient" by the federal government's definition (as cited in Fitzgerald, 1995a). Another family from China opens a restaurant in a small town, and English is their second language. In none of the schools where the above children now attend are there teachers endorsed specifically to meet linguistic needs, so the special educators are turned to for advice.

Special education teachers have been trained to meet a variety of special needs, and they are accustomed to involving the family in determining the strengths and needs of a student. Parents can also be very helpful in working with ELLs. From the family, the teachers can learn about what the family values, if the child has gone to school and in what language, as well as much more. In addition, as the teachers begin to establish a relationship, they have an opportunity to validate what the child already knows. Knowing another language needs to be viewed as an asset, not a deficit. The language and cultural background need to be taken into account to insure a successful learning experience. Some of these issues are addressed in the Starter Kit for Primary Teachers (Appendix).

Theme of Balance

Special educators know the importance of finding methods and strategies that are sound and functional; not just popular. A call to balance comes through from several authors, as they urge educators to build on current reading research in first language as well as second language research (Fitzgerald, 1995a; Fitzgerald, 1995b;Grabe, 1991; Stahl et al.1998). In her research review of ESL reading instruction in the United States, Fitzgerald (1995a) uses rigorous criteria for the studies she includes. She groups the studies into four areas: descriptions of what goes on in the ESL classroom in reading instruction, instructional methods, role and timing of native-language reading instruction, and instructional materials. Fitzgerald recommends that all teachers of ESL students need to learn about current reading theories and sound instructional approaches. The consistency of direct-instruction studies across ESL and native-English speaking readers, suggests that instructional techniques found to be sound for the one group be implemented with the other group. In her review of 67 research reports in ESL cognitive reading processes, Fitzgerald (1995b) concludes that the findings imply that ESL teachers could follow sound principles of reading instruction based on current cognitive research done with native English speakers. Some evidence also pointed to some cognitive processing areas that might deserve extra attention in ESL learning situations in the United States. These included ESL learners' slower reading and fewer responses in reading situations; which suggest mainly that teachers might display more than normal patience, take care when wording questions and making interactive comments in order to maximize the opportunity of activating thought processes.

RC 022 975

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Another component of balance addresses the issue of incorporating strategies to improve word recognition while providing for the reading of meaningful, connected text (Adams, 1990). Stahl, Duffy-Hester, and Stahl (1998) in their examination of phonics, state that arriving at a balance in effective reading instruction involves considering the needs of the children. For example, they suggest that an effective first-grade program might involve elements associated with whole language as well as more direct instructional approaches. More specifically Stahl et al. mention that children entering first grade with a low literacy background may need more direct instruction to develop concepts other students may have learned through print-based home experiences with literacy. Stahl et al. make clear that research and common sense suggest principles of good phonics instruction. Good phonics instruction should: develop the alphabetic principle; develop phonological awareness; provide a thorough grounding in the letters; not teach rules, need not use worksheets, should not dominate instruction, and not have to be boring; provides sufficient practice in reading words; leads to automatic word recognition; and be part of reading instruction. In the many approaches to phonics that are reviewed, the focus is on making this phonics information available to children in whatever approach the teacher uses.

Theme of Vocabulary Development

Students who do well in school have larger vocabularies (Smith, 1941 and Shand, 1993 cited in Gunning, 1998). When people are beginning to learn a language, there are not very many words at their disposal. In the early grades, the emphasis is on learning to read and a certain amount of vocabulary is required. About fourth grade, the transition to reading to learn takes place and more academic vocabulary is needed rapidly. Vocabulary development is essential for English language learners because we know there is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge in English and academic achievement (Saville-Troike, 1984). The best predictor of students' ability to understand text is their level of vocabulary (Maria, 1990 cited in Gunning, 1998). Unknown vocabulary was the major linguistic factor that adversely affected the Hispanic children's reading test performance (Garcia, 1991). Garcia discovered that more that 10% of the words used in a test passage were unknown to Hispanic students. The Hispanic students were attempting to read a text at their "frustration" level. When the text is at the frustration level, the student is neither fluent in reading the selection nor able to recall or understand textual information. Building the vocabularies of our ELL population is vital for their success.

The literature contains a variety of studies that suggest different ways to approach vocabulary development. Stahl and Fairbanks (1986) found that given the right kind of instruction before reading a selection, low-achieving readers did as well as bright students on a series of comprehension tasks. Vocabulary instruction needs to be thorough and deep according to Gunning (1998). Effective vocabulary instruction is characterized by three principles that can be used to modify and improve existing methods of teaching word meanings (Stahl, 1986). The first principal is to give both context and definition. The second is to encourage "deep" processing which leads to a person generating a novel product – using one's own words. The third principle involves giving multiple exposures.

In order for effective instruction to develop, guidelines for evaluating vocabulary instruction would be beneficial. Carr and Wixson (1986) offer four guidelines. First, they suggest that instruction should help students relate new vocabulary to their background knowledge. Secondly, they mention that instruction should help students develop elaborated word knowledge. Thirdly, they propose that instruction should provide for active student involvement in learning new vocabulary. Fourthly, they stress that instruction should develop students' strategies for acquiring new vocabulary independently.

A successful vocabulary program will employ a variety of methods (Readence, Bean, and Baldwin, 1998). Nagy, Herman, and Anderson (1985), administered a study to determine whether students do acquire measurable knowledge about unfamiliar words while reading natural text. The subjects included fifty-seven eighth-grade students of average and above average reading ability. They were given either an expository or narrative text of about 1000 words on length to read. Following the reading, the students completed two vocabulary assessment tasks on fifteen target words from each passage, an individual interview, and a multiple-choice test. The researchers believe the results demonstrate that learning from context does take place. The major result is the demonstration of learning from context from one or a very few exposures to unfamiliar words in natural text. The strength of learning from context lies in its long-term, cumulative effects. For educators at large, the results suggest that a moderate amount of reading, which a teacher can influence, will lead to substantial vocabulary gains.

Three methods of teaching word meaning, including the verbal and visual word association (keyword method), are compared in a study by Eeds and Cockrum, 1985. The first method, teacher interaction, taught target words by helping students expand an already existing conceptual network. The second method, dictionary, had students pair the words to be learned with dictionary definitions. The third (Control) had students read the words in a meaningful context of a junior novel. The fifth grade students involved in the study were from three classes in the same school in southwestern United States. Results showed the Teacher Interaction Group had the best vocabulary retention, followed by the Dictionary Group and then the Control Group. From this study four steps involved in the keyword method used in the teacher interaction, influence positively the acquisition of new vocabulary. These steps include the activating of the common experiences, the personal hookup of the new label to the individual experience, the contrast of the non-example, and the translation into personal language.

Hopkins and Bean (1998) provide a variation of the keyword strategy, as they present vocabulary learning with the verbal-visual word association strategy in a Native American community. The strategy is modified to use to teach roots and prefixes to work with junior high and high school students. The authors choose unknown vocabulary with prefixes or root words from text the students are working on in reading class. Modeling the drawing of a square, and dividing it into four smaller squares is the first step. In one square a prefix or root word is written. In the second, a definition is inserted. In the third square an example of a word using that prefix or root word is added. In the last square, a picture is drawn of the example. The teacher is encouraged to use a think-aloud procedure while modeling. The authors state that this strategy is particularly helpful with struggling readers in various culturally diverse classrooms.

Recently a study examined effects of the keyword (English and Spanish) method in comparison with the rehearsal method on the vocabulary learning of 60 LEP fifth-grade students in two schools in southwest United States (Zhang & Schumm, 2000). The researchers note that the keyword method is one of the most extensively studied mnemonic techniques applied to students' speed of acquisition, memorization, and comprehension. Sadoski and Paivio (1994), as cited by the researchers, speak of a Dual Coding Theory that pertains to previous experiences or prior knowledge, the basis from which mental representations derive. Experiences can be linguistic (related to language) and nonlinguistic (frequently referred to as processing imagery). The keyword strategy is applied in two stages. First, identify a concrete, easily-imaged word, or a keyword that bears certain phonetic similarities to the word to be learned. Secondly, figure out a corresponding image or respond to an interactive picture provided. An example given is, the meaning of the English word, peavey, is "hook". The keyword, "pear" is found then a corresponding image or an interactive picture associating both the meaning "hook", and the keyword "pear", might be "a pear stuck on the end of a hook". In the process the student is making important cognitive associations between known and to be learned information. A major finding of the study was that the keyword method is highly effective for immediate vocabulary recall for LEP students. Secondly, the method was found to have certain retention effects on LEP students' recall of vocabulary definitions. Thirdly, the keyword method was found to be applicable to classroom instruction where LEP students are involved. Of significance is that the keyword method can help students become more strategic and independent learners. It is one tool for teaching students to make links between what they know and what they need to learn.

Dana and Rodriguez (1992), investigated whether a study system designed specifically for studying vocabulary would be more effective than student-selected study methods. The authors of the study developed a system that guided students to pretest their knowledge, organize their vocabulary words, anchor them in memory, practice them at prescribed intervals to facilitate retention, and perform an exit test. TOAST was the acronym used to cue students to the steps of the system of test, organize, anchor, say, and test. The students involved in this study were sixth graders from three classes in the Midwest. One class received instruction in the use of the TOAST study system while the other two classes were directed to select "their own best method" of studying. The results of the study indicated that the TOAST system was more effective in four ways: first, in improving students' recognition of definitions as measured by a multiple choice test; secondly in facilitating the generation of definitions as measured by a test where students needed to provide a definition from memory; thirdly, in mediating the formation of original sentences as measured by a test where students needed to generate their own sentences; and fourthly, in aiding retention of definitions over a one week period as measured by a multiple choice test. The authors suggest that TOAST offers a procedure for independent study of vocabulary to supplement classroom instruction.

Theme of Peer Involvement

Peers are often a neglected resource (Richard-Amato, 1992). A common complaint of ELLs is that they are left out or ignored. Peer work is one way of actively engaging students in learning and decentering instruction. It is an opportunity for students to be involved actively in their learning, instead of being spectators.

Diverse learners participating in peer led discussion groups in a regular education fifth grade classroom, is the focus of a study by Goatley, Brock, and Raphael (1995). The researchers observed and documented the interactions among a diverse group of five fifth graders as they read and responded to the final novel in their reading program. Three of the group had traditionally received their reading instruction from Chapter 1, ESL, and Special Education Resource pull-out programs. All participated actively and benefited from the discussion group. The ESL student in particular stated that the book club helped her understand what she was reading.

Mathes and Howard (1998) undertook an empirical study to examine the effectiveness of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies for First-Grade Readers (First-Grades PALS) as a tool for enhancing the reading achievement of different learners. The study included a great variety of students, including students whose first language was not English. Ninety-six first-grade students in 20 classrooms participated; 10 classrooms incorporated First-Grade PALS into their reading program while 10 continued to teach reading as usual. First Grade Pals is a set of early reading strategies that incorporates research-based best practices in early literacy instruction and uses first graders to mediate the instruction of other first graders. Peers were taught Coach and Reader roles so they could participate in two sets of routines: Sounds and Words, a code-based activity, and Partner Read-Aloud, a literature activity consistent with a holistic framework for reading instruction. Low-achieving students seemed to profit the most from participating in First-Grade PALS according to statistically significant findings and large effect sizes found in several measures. These measures included word attack, word identification, oral reading rate, and early reading skills, such as concepts of print and phonological segmentation. Both teachers and students who participated in First-Grade PALS, reported satisfaction. Teachers stated that PALS was an effective tool for accommodating diversity. Students felt that PALS helped them become better readers and they liked doing First-Grade Pals.

Window into the School Life of an English Language Learner

Juan (not his real name) came into second grade with a winning smile, unable to read although he had been in the same school in the United States since kindergarten. As he came into the room, I let him know that I would be communicating frequently with his parents. I made it clear that both his parents and I had high expectations for him. As the class began opening exercises of the morning, I let him know that all students would participate in various ways. When children were in a turn taking activity, I asked him to slip up his hand when he was ready to give an answer. At first, he thought his smile would be enough participation, but soon he became a much more active participant in the class.

In cooperative activities, Juan became a desired member as his artistic talents became evident. He also learned to dialogue about many topics as he worked on various projects. As a group read a story, he at first learned to follow silently, but soon was even able to read a repeating pattern. When it came time to illustrate a favorite part of the story, he was ready. The weekly second grade level newspaper was of great interest to Juan as the charts, graphs, and other visuals helped him understand the content more easily.

Reading started to be a good part of the day. The phonics based reading series (Appendix) was a highlight for Juan, because he finally began to understand the connection between letters and sounds, how reading went from left to right, and more. His eyes sparkled as he actually began to read independently, and he was able to comprehend what he was reading. Juan also started to get excited about choosing books that he wanted to read, as he became part of Accelerated Reader (Appendix). He would read a book independently, read it with a peer, and then would inform me that he was ready for a comprehension test on the computer. Reaching his Accelerated Reader goal was high on his priority list.

Juan continued to smile as the year progressed, but smiling was no longer an escape from answering a question. He became an active participant in our classroom. It was as though he had come alive. I still remember the day when he bounced into the room running from one word to another that I had up in the class - " Clock, table, door...", he called out, as finally words came alive to him. Juan was learning and enjoying it!

Concluding Comments

Special educators can make a difference in educating the members of a linguistically diverse student body. They can put to use their valuable training and expertise in developing the students' educational plans that will provide meaningful learning experiences, remembering to involve the families. They can encourage the general educators in their school to be certain to provide a balanced educational experience that encompasses systematic phonics based instruction and a print rich environment. In addition, educators would do well to focus strongly on building vocabulary in a variety of ways. The valuable resource of peers, whether they know the dominant language of their fellow student or not, can provide a meaningful, interactive, educational experience for all involved. Whatever the title or label of the adults or children in the classroom, an inclusive, interactive environment needs to be fostered. Then Juan, or someone like him, will be glad to be there, and will thrive as he gets involved in learning.

References

Adams, M. J. (1990). Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Carr, E., Wixson, K. K. (1986) Guidelines for evaluating vocabulary instruction. Journal of Reading, April 588-595.

Dana, C., & Rodriguez, M. (1992). A system to study vocabulary. Reading Research and Instruction, 31 (4), 78-84.

Eeds, M. & Cockrum, W. A. (1985). Teaching word meanings by expanding schemata vs. dictionary work vs. reading in context. Journal of Reading, 28 (6), 492-497.

Fitzgerald, J. (1995a) English-as-a-second-language reading instruction in the United States: A research review. Journal of Reading Behavior, 27, (2), 115-152.

Fitzgerald, J. (1995b) English-as-a-second-language learners' cognitive reading processes: A review of research in the United States. Review of Educational Research, 65, (2) 145-190.

Freeman, D. E., & Freeman, Y. S. (2000) Teaching Reading in Multilingual Classrooms. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Garcia, G. E. (1991). Factors influencing the English reading test performance of Spanish speaking Hispanic children. Reading Research Quarterly,26, (4), 371-392.

Goatley, V. J., & Brock, C. H., & Raphael, T. E. (1995). Diverse learners participating in regular education "Book Clubs". Reading Research Quarterly, 30, (3), 352-380.

Grabe, W. (1991). Current developments in second language reading research. TESOL Quarterly, 25 (3), 375-406.

Gunning, T.G. (1998). Assessing and correcting reading and writing difficulties. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Hopkins, G., & Bean, T. (1998) Vocabulary learning with the verbal-visual word association strategy in a Native American community. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 42 (4), 274-281.

Maria, K. (1990). Reading comprehension instruction: Issues and strategies. Parkton, MD: York Press.

Mathes, P. G., & Howard, J. K. (1998). Peer-assisted learning strategies for first-grade readers: Responding to the needs of diverse learners. Reading Research Quarterly, 33, (1), 66-95.

Nagy, W. E., Herman, P. A., & Anderson, R. C. (1985). Learning words in context. Reading Research Quarterly, 20 (2), 233-253.

Readence, J. E., Bean, T. W., & Baldwin, R. S. (1998). Content area literacy: An integrated approach (6th ed.). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Richard-Amato, P. A. (1992). Peer-teachers: The neglected research. In P.A. Richard-Amato & M. A. Snow (Eds.), The multicultural classroom (pp.271-284). White Plains, New York: Longman.

Sadoski, M., & Paivio, A. (1994). A dual coding view of imagery and verbal processes in reading comprehension. In R. B. Ruddell, & H. Singer (Eds.), Theoretical models and processes of reading (4th ed., pp. 414-447). Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.

Saville-Troike, M. (1984). What really matters in second language learning for academic achievement? TESOL Quarterly, 18 (2), 199-219.

Shand, M. (1993). The role of vocabulary in developmental reading disabilities (Tech. Rep. No. 576). Urbana, IL: Center for the Study of Reading.

Smith, M. K. (1941). Measurement of the size of general English vocabulary through the elementary grades and high school. General Psychological Monographs, 24, 311-345.

Stahl, S. A. (1986). Three principles of effective vocabulary instruction. Journal of Reading, 29, 662-668.

Stahl, S. A. & Fairbanks, M. M. (1986). The effects of vocabulary instruction: A model-based meta-analysis. Review of Educational Research, 56, 72-110.

Stahl, S. A., Dufffy-Hester, A. M., & Stahl, K. A. D. (1998). Everything you wanted to know about phonics (but were afraid to ask). Reading Research Quarterly, 33 (3), 338-355.

Zhang, A., & Schumm, J. S. (2000). Exploring effects of the keyword method on limited English proficient students' vocabulary recall and comprehension. Reading Research and Instruction 39 (3), 202-221.

Appendix

Some Helpful Resources:

1. Help! They Don't Speak English - Starter Kit for Primary Teachers (1998)
A resource guide for educators of limited proficient migrant students, grades Pre-K - 6.
Available from The Eastern Stream Center on Resources and Training (ESCORT) for free.
Bugbee Hall - Room 305
Oneonta, New York 13820
1-800-451-8058
ackleyle@oneonta.edu

2. Reading for All Learners - program designed to assist parents, tutors, paraeducators, and teachers in an easy-to-learn format. A series of 150 small decodable readers, ranging in difficulty from kindergarten to mid-third grade is the key to the program.
For ordering information : Cost: inexpensive
Attn: Wendy
Swift Publishing
88 N West State Road
American Fork, UT 84003
1-800-292-2831

3. Accelerated Readers - individualized instruction with learning information software. AR helps motivate, manage and assess literature-based reading.
Available for a reasonable amount from:
Renaissance Learning Incorporated
P.O. Box 8036
Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin 54495-8036
1-888-656-2931
www.renlearn.com